



Ministry of Natural Resources
Hon. Leo Bernier, Minister
W. O. Macnee, Deputy Minister



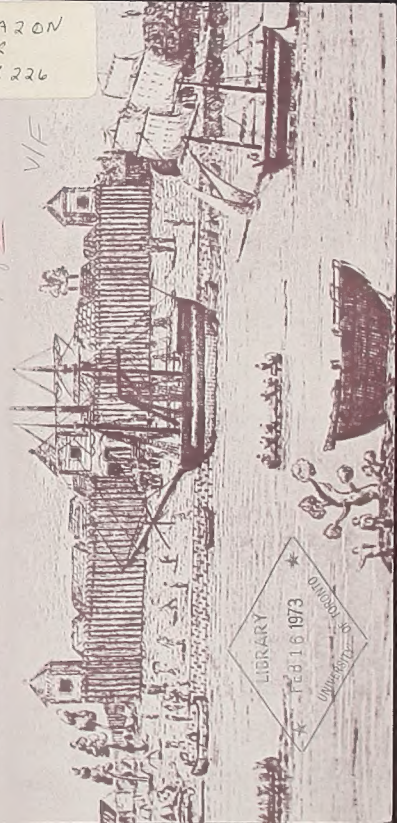
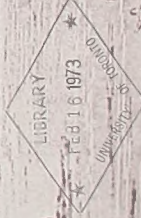
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Fort William

Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources

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Origin of Fort William

Fort William stood among 600 historical posts in the Canadian fur trade empire. Nearly all of its counterparts have vanished. They have been burned and built over, so that even their locations have sometimes been forgotten. Several different fur posts preceded Fort William in this area. The earliest, a temporary Fort Kaministiquia, was erected on the south branch of the Kaministiquia, near its mouth, by the French trader from Montreal, Daniel Greysolon Dulhut, in 1679. The second Fort Kaministiquia, 1717, was built by Zachaire Roubtel de la Noue, as a strong link in Frontenac's chain of French stockades pressing from Montreal against the English on Hudson Bay and the American seaboard. This second Fort Kaministiquia diverted trade from the Hudson's Bay Company to the markets of the Montreal traders. In 1729 La Verendrye accepted its command as a base for his dramatic westward explorations. The Grand Portage post was built by the Northwest Company shortly after its incorporation. Grand Portage, which refers to the nine mile portage at the Pigeon River, remained the North West headquarters of the Company's expanding operations from 1779 until 1800, when confirmation of the new American boundary and customs duties forced it to move.

A new fort was completed about 1804. Ten years later, it was "a pretty village" enclosed by a fifteen-foot palisade. Its population, all occupied in the fur trade, totalled 2,500. Beneath the C.P.R. tracks now in modern Thunder Bay lie the remains of this bustling trade centre, with its Great Hall, carpentry shops, canoe yards,

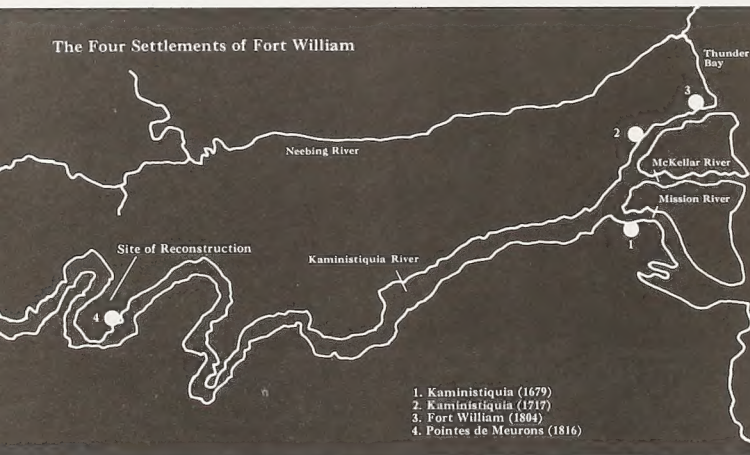
guard house and gate, officers' barracks and servants quarters, guides' lodgings, warehouse, powder magazine, stores and workshops. Evidence of these structures is being painstakingly collected by archaeologists for the Ontario Government's reconstruction of the Fort complex.

Fur trade competition intensified in the early 1800's to the point of bloody battle. In retaliation, Fort William itself was seized by Lord Selkirk in 1816. Indeed, the reconstruction site for Fort William borders on the resting place of the small Hudson's Bay Company post built by Selkirk, Pointes de Meuron. Archaeologists have not yet pinpointed the boundaries of this post, which included a large frame house, a block house, various other buildings of hewn timber, "a towering flagstaff and a large Cross".

In 1821 the Northwest Company and Hudson's Bay Company amalgamated, under the older Company's name. Although the Hudson's Bay Company has continued to this day, Fort William gradually declined. From 1881 to 1902, its buildings were levelled to make way for the Canadian Pacific Railway.

Now the Ministry of Natural Resources through National Heritage Limited, is recreating this thriving centre of commerce. We invite you to enjoy the reconstruction as it takes place.

The Four Settlements of Fort William



1. Kaministiquia (1679)
2. Kaministiquia (1717)
3. Fort William (1804)
4. Pointes de Meurons (1816)

Fur trade country

From this area furs were shipped over the Great Lakes in huge canoes to Montreal and the fur markets of the world. The trip required six weeks of paddling east along the North Shore of Lake Superior and Lake Huron and portaging up the French River and down the Mattawa into the Ottawa and the St. Lawrence.

In return came huge loads of cargo for the Indian trade. The voyageurs brought tobacco, liquor, guns, axes and dry goods, loading their great Montreal canoes with over 60 pieces of trade goods weighing 90 pounds each. Gradually their enormous birch bark canoes developed into sailing vessels on the Western lakes, and there was the beginning of inland navigation as we know it today.

The whole country west of Upper Canada was the fur trade. There was no other commerce, no other law. There were no roads, there were only the fur trade canoe routes and the portages from rapids to rapids. The only white men in the interior of the country were fur traders. They drove their men and canoes further to the remotest forests of Northwestern Canada, in a triumphant discovery of new fur lands.

William McGillivray partner of the North-West Company, with his headquarters at his namesake, Fort William (1803-1821).

